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The most important news first: We have reached “our” floe and Polarstern is attached to it firmly using ice anchors. But let us start from the beginning. Polarstern had to fight against thick ice loaded with several decimetres of snow on Monday. Sometimes we could proceed only after several trials to break through heavy ice ridges. The next day the helicopters were used in the search of an appropriate floe to host us for the coming weeks and finally one was found. However, the way towards the floe was extremely difficult. For hours we were beset by huge ice floes, and then when we finally reached the floe on Thursday, it proved to be not the right one. The floe was depressed so deep into the water by a massive snow layer that the actual ice body was completely flooded. We had to look for a better one. This meant additional reconnaissance flights until a suitable floe was found. Again thick ice and massive pressure ridges barred the way towards it.

We approached the floe on Friday, just to get stuck about a hundred meters short of it. But finally, we managed to anchor Polarstern at the floe on Saturday at 11a.m. Our International Ice Floe Reconnaissance Team measured ice thicknesses and identified suitable areas on the floe. A following discussion of all scientists resulted in having Polarstern to move a few meters to its final parking position. Ice anchors were placed and two roads flagged out on Saturday. These roads lead to the different „plots“ on which the first instruments are already deployed. Thus we reached our floe just in time to celebrate the First Advent.

I would like to mention that some groups started their work much earlier. This holds true for our small group of bathymetry. After leaving the economic zone of South Africa data recording began with multi beam echosounder (MBE) and sub bottom profiler. These instruments collect data on the morphology and structure of the seabed. First results gave some impressions of a seamount of 1000m height rising from the 4500m deep Agulhas Basin. Supposedly this is a volcano. These data are used to map unknown areas. They are reported to the International Hydrographic Organization to improve navigational maps. The German project ended at 60°S due to the missing permit by the Federal Environment Agency. Since then, only the Russian project can be continued.

Today almost everybody visited the floe and we are sending best Advent Greetings back home.

In the name of the expedition members
Michael Spindler